Cultural Resources

ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Historic Archeology

Historic archeological sites in the Park are largely associated with transportation corridors, water sources, and mining and ranching operations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The research and information potential of historical archeological sites is an important aspect of their National Register eligibility.

Status of Archeological Research

Although it is estimated that only about 6 percent of the lands within the boundaries of pre-1994 Death Valley National Monument (and an even smaller proportion of the lands added to the monument in 1994) have been surveyed for archeological resources, the overall cultural sequence is well documented. In particular, the archeological research and survey efforts of Alice Hunt and William Wallace, conducted primarily during the 1950s and 1960s, have formed the bulk of extant data about prehistoric native cultures. Over 2,000 archeological sites, covering some 10,000 years of human activity, have been identified. Archeological sites include house circles; habitation areas; complex sites; rockshelters; campsites; workshops; quarries and lithic scatters; hunting blinds; plant food processing stations; storage pits; cemetery and burial areas; rock art (petroglyphs/pictographs); rock alignments; and rock traps or caches. Areas of particular archeological significance within the Park boundaries include Butte Valley, Mesquite Flat, the floor of Death Valley, Grapevine Canyon, high elevation localities in the Panamint Mountains, alluvial fans on the west side of Death Valley, and springs.

More recent archeological survey has been driven by compliance actions and salvage operations related to Park development plans. These efforts, although more up-to-date in terms of professional scientific standards, have sometimes lacked a cohesive research design which would tie them to larger issues of a parkwide or desert-wide nature. As a result, past researchers have often been forced to treat individual sites in different portions of Death Valley as culturally distinct entities, resulting in sometimes confused cultural sequential chronologies.

At present, the National Park Service is completing a three-year systematic, parkwide archeological survey of at-risk areas under a cooperative agreement with the University of California, Riverside.

Landforms and Archeological Resources

While archeological sites are found on virtually every type of landform in the Park, the persistent association of certain features with archeological sites allows for fairly reliable estimates about the types of landforms that are likely to support sites. Proximity to fresh water and food resources are the primary variables influencing Native American site location. For example, a spring in or near a mesquite grove would be an optimal location for a site. An alluvial fan generally lacks resources and would not have been a primary occupation or food collecting and processing site, but may have been the location of food storage facilities or a temporary campsite, trail, burial site, or rock art site, all of which fall outside of the parameters of a model based solely on subsistence variables.

However, previous environmental conditions must also be considered. Ancient late Pleistocene Era/early Lake Mojave Period beach features associated with now-extinct lacustrine and riparian habitat were prime occupation or food collecting and processing sites over 6,000 years ago, in spite of what the present landscape may look like.

Euro-American sites, while generally more easily identified than prehistoric sites, are generally associated with transportation networks and resource procurement/exploitation features. In the Park, transportation routes, water sources, and mining operations are prime locations where such archeological sites may be found. The network of interconnecting roads is usually preserved and is easily discernible from aerial photographs and early maps.

National Register of Historic Places

No prehistoric archeological sites or districts within the Park boundaries are listed on or have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Draft National Register nomination forms for archeological districts in the Park that have been prepared include: Butte Valley, Mesquite Spring, Racetrack-Goldbelt, Ubehebe Crater, Upper Emigrant, Upper Panamint, Death Valley Salt Pan, Furnace Creek, Mesquite Flat, Grapevine Canyon, Ibex Spring, Keane Wonder Mine, Saratoga Springs, and Lower Vine Ranch.

The National Park Service is planning to prepare national register nomination forms for archeological

districts such as Furnace Creek Wash, Saline Valley, and Eureka Valley.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

The Park has an impressive inventory of historical resources. The mountains and valleys contain sites associated with early Spanish and American exploration and survey of the vast Mojave Desert region, and the area is laced with remnants of prehistoric and protohistoric Native American trails as well as Euro-American trails, wagon roads, railroads, highways, and other early transportation arteries. The region contains numerous remnants of abandoned mining operations, sites of settlements long gone and nearly forgotten, railroad grades and railway structures. Fence lines, water tanks, and corrals testify to a continuing ranching-grazing industry and scattered remains of homesteads tell of a time when small farming operations were attempted in this arid land. There are significant reminders of early recreational and resort development associated with the advent of tourism to the region, as well as reminders of early federal government administration of portions of the area, including administration, maintenance, and residential buildings constructed by the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps.

Timbisha Shoshone Village

The Timbisha Shoshone people have lived in and around Death Valley since prehistoric times. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, members of the Tribe lived in four different locations in the Furnace Creek area. Finally in 1936 the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the National Park Service agreed on a site of approximately 40 acres for a permanent residential area south of Furnace Creek Ranch. This site became known as the Timbisha Shoshone Village.

In 1936, under NPS supervision, construction started on nine adobe residences, using materials provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Adobe was one of the common construction materials of the day, also used in many NPS structures.

The following year two communal facilities—laundry and a trading post—were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps under NPS supervision. Up until the 1940s, the village adobe structures housed most of the Timbisha Shoshone families living in the Death Valley area. Some moved elsewhere during World War II because of the lack of employment opportunities in the area of the Park. In the 1950s the National Park Service removed five adobe structures that were perceived to be vacant or semi-occupied, leaving six structures.

During the early 1980s, the remaining structures were rehabilitated and additional housing was purchased and moved to the village. The village has maintained a population of approximately 40–50 persons through the 1980s and the 1990s.

Beginning in the 1930s, and for many years afterwards, the Tribe was issued a permit for use of the village site. In 1983 the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe was granted federal recognition by the Secretary of the Interior. No permitting procedure has been used for many years.

Warm Springs – Saline Valley

Three natural hot springs in Saline Valley, known collectively as the Warm Springs, have become a popular recreational spot during the post-World War II era. Although events surrounding the early recreational use of the Warm Springs are somewhat obscure, local Euro-Americans had begun visiting and soaking in the springs by the early 1940s. By 1947, a small concrete tub had been constructed at the Lower Warm Spring, presumably by a cattleman or a sheepherder, to catch the runoff.

As growing numbers of people began visiting Lower Warm Spring, the most accessible of the three springs, to camp and soak in the warm water, the area slowly became "trashed." Despite the gradual "trashing" of the Warm Springs vicinity, however, some visitors wrote accounts describing the natural beauty of the area. During the fall of 1964, visitors to the Warm Springs began cleaning up the area, and in 1965 a new and larger tub was constructed at the Lower Warm Spring that could accommodate as many as a dozen people for soaking.

Palm Spring, sometimes referred to as Middle Warm Spring, is located about one-half mile above Lower Warm Spring. Less protected from the wind and sun than Lower Warm Spring because it is not surrounded by mesquite trees, it nevertheless became increasingly attractive as an alternate soaking area, partly because of the panoramic view of the surrounding valley and mountains that it provided. Like Lower Warm Spring, Palm Spring has a source pool of its own. People soaked in the source pool until 1968 when a group of users built a small retaining wall around the pool, laid a buried pipe to it, and constructed the first soaking pool.

The isolated Upper Warm Spring, located some three miles above Palm Spring, has no man-made soaking facilities. During the early 1980s, however, the Bureau of Land Management constructed a

fence around the spring to prevent feral burros from having access to the water. Desert pupfish were introduced in the springs, but they did not long survive. Thereafter, Upper Warm Spring was used as a soaking site by those who wanted to get away from the more popularly-used springs below.

By the late 1960s the Warm Springs had become a mecca for "hippies" and those preferring hedonist lifestyles characteristic of the era. Since that time, the Warm Springs have been the focus of steadily increasing visitation as a result of word of mouth recommendations and listings in popular hot springs literature. Whereas one party a week was common during the early 1960s, visitors began to stay at the springs for longer periods of time. Often parties of two or more began to camp at the springs for weeks or months, particularly during the winter season, but the greatest use of the springs came from "regulars" who began to make short but frequent trips to the springs. To accommodate the growing numbers of visitors during the 1960s and 1970s, the users constructed various improvements at Lower Warm Spring, including several larger soaking pools, a deck, separate pools for washing dishes, and a fish pond. In addition, a lawn and palm trees were planted and two airstrips were laid out nearby.

During the past two decades, "regulars" to the Warm Springs, "consisting of an eclectic collection of bohemians, loners, individualists, tourists, and others who simply share a love for hot springs and a desire to escape from the complexities of modern life," have developed an informal self-policing community that maintains and cleans the springs and their vicinity. As a result of the increasing concern of springs' users that federal land management agencies would regulate activities at the Warm Springs, the users have formed an organization to protect their interests — the Saline Preservation Association (SPA).

Cultural Landscapes

Many cultural landscapes exist in the Park that are potentially eligible for listing on the National Register, but cultural landscape studies have not been undertaken to identify their character-defining elements. Landscapes reflecting mining, ranching, ethnographic, and administrative activities can be seen throughout the Park. Especially significant landscapes are found at Scotty's Castle, Lower Vine Ranch, and the salt tram in Saline Valley, and, in association with many of the CCC-era national monument administration structures. Other significant cultural landscapes include the: (a) contemporary Timbisha Shoshone Village; (b) Chloride Cliff and Keane Wonder mining sites; (c) Cow Creek CCC maintenance yard and administrative area; (d) Harmony Borax Works; (e) various large and small mining sites; (f) cultivated areas and orchards connected with ranching and agricultural activities; and (g) extensive layouts of gardens, groves, and recreational facilities related to tourist resorts.

National Register of Historic Places

Six historic period properties in Death Valley National Park are listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

- Skidoo — April 16, 1974
- Harmony Borax Works — December 31, 1974
- Eagle Borax Works — December 31, 1974
- Saline Valley Salt Tram Historic Structure — December 31, 1974
- Leadfield — June 10, 1975
- Death Valley Scotty Historic District — July 20, 1978

Five historic properties in the Park have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places:

- Residential, Administrative, Maintenance, and Visitor Use Facilities in Death Valley National Monument Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps — (Multiple Property Nomination) — May 10, 1989: Camp Wildrose Historic District, Cow Creek Historic District, Emigrant Junction Comfort Station (E-85), Park Village Comfort Station (PV-69), Texas Spring Campground Comfort Stations (TS-113, TS-114) and stone picnic tables
- Original Bullfrog–Bullfrog West Extension Mine — September 18, 1980
- Homestake-King and Gold Bar Mines and Mills — July 6, 1981
- Las Vegas and Tonopah Railroad Grade — July 8, 1981
- Lee Historic District — October 5, 1982

Seventeen draft national register nomination forms have been prepared for the following properties in the Park in connection with the aforementioned *Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining*. The forms have been submitted to the NPS Pacific-Great Basin Support Office, but no formal determinations of eligibility have been processed for them:

- Big Talc Mine
- Garibaldi Mine
- Gold Hill Mill
- Harrisburg Historic District

- Hungry Bill's Ranch Historic District
- Journigan's Mill
- Lemoigne Mine and Cabin
- Lost Burro Mine and Mill
- Panamint Treasure Mine
- Queen of Sheba Mine
- Wildrose Canyon Charcoal Kilns
- Chloride Cliff Historic District
- Echo Canyon Historic District
- Greenwater Historic District
- Keane Wonder Historic District
- Corduroy Road
- Furnace Creek Wash Historic District

Three draft national register nomination forms have been prepared for the following historic properties in the lands that were added to the national monument in 1994:

- Barker Ranch
- Panamint City
- Gem Mine and Mill

Four draft national register nomination forms were prepared by the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe through a NPS Historic Preservation Grant:

- Mushroom Rock
- Ubehebe Crater
- Navel Spring
- "Tumpisa" District (Furnace Creek area)

Museum Collection

Park staff are responsible for monitoring, documenting, and preserving a large, diverse museum collection that includes more than 177,000 cataloged objects and specimens, some stored in substandard conditions. An additional 23,000 archeological artifacts and records are at the NPS Western Archeological Center in Tucson, Arizona. Museum collections include historical objects and archival documents, archeological artifacts, ethnological materials, biological specimens, geological samples, and paleontological materials. Numbers of currently cataloged objects in the various disciplines range from an estimated 78,900 historical objects to approximately 280 ethnological items. There are potentially 1,600 objects associated with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990. Many of these objects may be returned to the Tribe as a result of this act.

In 2000, the National Park Service opened a new state-of-the-art curatorial facility at Cow Creek. The museum collection constitutes an important part of the overall resources offered by the Park. In historic districts, the collection constitutes a primary resource that visitors view. A relatively large number of historic objects are on display in the national register–listed Death Valley Scotty Historic District. Diverse material types are exhibited in the historic house museum as well as on the grounds.

Plan Actions

The National Park Service will develop and implement a systematic, integrated program to identify, inventory, monitor, evaluate, and nominate archeological sites, historic properties, cultural landscapes, and ethnographic resources to the national register and will manage, protect, and preserve such listed properties in a way that will preserve their documented archeological, architectural, ethnographic, historic, or research values. A collection management program will be further implemented to: (1) improve storage conditions to meet standards for all Park collections stored; (2) provide a more comprehensive preventive conservation program; (3) acquire museum objects/ specimens, including appropriate replacement furnishings for highly impacted objects targeted for exhibit; and (4) improve collection access and use, as appropriate. The collections management program will include cataloging the significant backlog of objects and collections at the Park and correcting the deficiencies identified in the "Checklist for Preservation and Protection of Museum Collections."

The National Park Service will develop and implement a systematic applied cultural resource research program to ensure that (1) there will be adequate baseline information on location, condition, threats, and

significance/ integrity of resources; (2) interpretation and preservation treatment of resources will be accurate; and (3) appropriate means will be used to manage, protect, preserve, and interpret Native American heritage or other ethnographic resources. The research program will include the following studies:

- archeological studies, including a regionally based archeological research plan, an updated archeological overview and assessment, and completion of archeological identification and evaluation studies
- ethnographic studies, including a cultural sites inventory
- historical studies, including a cultural landscape inventory and cultural landscape report, historic structure reports, an administrative history, and an updated list of classified structures
- an updated scope of collections statement and collection management plan

The Park's resource management plan will address the requirements, projects, and funding to implement the cultural resource program. To support this program, the National Park Service will develop collaborative partnerships with government agencies, tribes, and public and private organizations that have cultural resource management or research capabilities or expertise. These entities could include federal, state, and county agencies, academic institutions, local and regional cultural and historical organizations, and the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe or other Native American tribes having affiliation with lands in the national park. To achieve cultural resource program objectives, under the authority of 36 CFR 1.5, the National Park Service might control or limit human activities in areas designated as culturally sensitive or threatened.